

STATEMENT OF

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OF THE HOUSE TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

ON
TRANSIT AND OVER-THE-ROAD BUS SECURITY

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Chairman Petri, Ranking Member DeFazio, and Members of the Committee, on behalf of the more than 180,000 members of the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) and ATU International President Warren S. George, I want to thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify today on the ATU's priorities and strategies for enhancing transit and over-the-road bus security.

The ATU is the largest labor union representing public transportation employees in the United States and Canada. ATU members are bus, van, subway, and light rail operators, clerks, baggage handlers and maintenance employees in urban transit, over-the-road and school bus industries, as well as paramedical personnel, ambulance operators, clerical personnel, and municipal workers. The safety and security of our nation's public transportation systems is of utmost importance to the leadership and members of the ATU.

Public transportation, by its very nature, is an attractive target for crime and terrorist attacks. It brings masses of people together, is open, highly visible and familiar, and when threatened or attacked, it can disrupt commerce, instill fear and bring an entire region to a grinding halt.

The attacks on London's transit system last year are the perfect example of the crippling effects that such an attack can have on an entire community. When four suicide bombers detonated explosive devices in the London Underground and aboard a double-decker bus, 56 people died and more than 700 people were injured. In addition, the entire City of London was paralyzed for more than a day as citizens were left with no way to or from work, and others, including tourists, steered clear of the city for fear of additional attacks. A separate failed attempt two weeks later similarly stalled normal operations in London and surrounding areas.

And the London attacks are not the first - or even the second - time in recent history that we have seen the devastating effects of an attack on a public transportation system. In 2004 alone, an explosion in a Moscow Metro rail car killed 39 people and wounded 129 others; and a coordinated series of ten explosions aboard four packed commuter trains in Madrid killed 191 people and injured over 1,500 others.

A decade earlier, ongoing bombing campaigns directed at the Paris Metro resulted in hundreds of casualties; and the release of sarin gas in the Tokyo subway system threatened the lives of between 5,000 and 6,000 people, resulting in 12 deaths and marking the first time chemical or biological weapons have been deployed on a large scale by terrorists. In Israel and elsewhere, buses have too often been the unfortunate targets of terrorist bombings.

Faced with this reality, the ATU has for years worked to raise the awareness of our members and employers to this danger and to advance real, concrete solutions and initiatives to enhance the safety and security of the systems operated and maintained by ATU members. We firmly believe that the labor community must be a partner in any comprehensive effort to address the security threats facing our industries. For that reason, we have worked closely with our members, the transit and bus industries, the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) and elected officials at all levels of government.

Shortly after September 11th, the ATU produced and distributed a security training video and pamphlets providing guidance to our members on how to prevent, deter and respond in emergency situations. We also conducted a joint labor-management conference on transit security that was attended by more than 100 transit agency officials and employees from across the U.S. We worked with DOT and industry security experts to develop *Transit Watch*, a nationwide safety and security awareness program that encourages the active participation and vigilance of transit passengers and employees. And we contributed to the design, distribution and promotion of the National Transit Institute's security and emergency response training programs for frontline transit employees.

We have also testified numerous times before Congress on this issue, continuously advocated for increased funding for transit and over-the-road bus security enhancements, and have assisted in developing legislation, including legislation introduced by Members of this Committee, that would enhance transit and over-the-road bus security by requiring the development, adoption and implementation of security plans by transit systems and training for all frontline transit employees.

The transit and over-the-road bus industries themselves have also taken admirable steps toward securing their operations, but - due in large part to funding constraints - they have not gone far enough. The reality is that the industry and the ATU can not do this alone. The federal government must step up to the plate and provide the necessary funding, guidance

and even mandates to provide the level of security that transit and bus passengers and employees deserve.

The federal government has not stepped up to the plate yet. With much of the emphasis on airlines, rail and port security, no sector of our transportation network has been more neglected when it comes to security than transit and over-the-road bus operations. In the transit sector, the deficiency in security funding is staggering. While the industry has estimated the actual need to be \$6 billion in order to adequately secure the network, only a sliver of that has already been provided and current budget requests submitted by the Administration are woefully inadequate.

Specifically, DOT's fiscal year 2007 budget request includes only \$42.5 million for transit security from DOT's budget; and the DHS budget would require the transit and over-the-road bus industries to share \$600 million in grant funding with ports, rail, and the trucking industry - an amount that is insufficient for even one industry, much less five.

In addition to funding, it is the responsibility of the federal government to ensure that certain necessary steps are taken to enhance security.

Common sense tells us that the single most important thing that we can do to increase transit and over-the-road bus security is to provide each and every frontline transit employee - including rail and bus operators, customer service personnel and maintenance employees - with security and emergency preparedness and response training. While we should not abandon research and deployment of new technologies, we need to recognize what has been proven to be the most cost-effective security measure: employee training.

In the event of a terrorist attack within a mass transit system, the response of employees at the scene within the first few minutes is crucial to minimizing the loss of life and to evacuating passengers away from the incident. Transit employees are the first on the scene, even before police, firefighters or emergency medical responders. They must know what to do in order to save the lives of their passengers and themselves.

During the 1995 sarin gas incident in Tokyo, two transit employees unnecessarily lost their lives when they tried to dispose of the agent dispersal device themselves, instead of simply evacuating the scene. Proper training would have prevented these losses and possibly decreased the number of passengers who were exposed to the deadly gas.

Frontline transit and over-the-road bus employees are also crucial in preventing attacks. They are the eyes and ears of the system and are often the first to discover suspicious activities and threats, or the first to receive reports from passengers. These employees need to know how to recognize security threats and need to know the appropriate protocols to follow for reporting and responding to potential threats.

International security experts confirm that employee training is effective and crucial in security efforts. Rafi Ron, former Director of Security at Tel-Aviv Ben-Gurion International Airport told a Senate Committee last year that behavior pattern “techniques implemented by trained security and non-security personnel have proven to be a valuable measure in the detection and prevention of terrorist attacks in public facilities.” Ron went on to observe “training provides the skills and confidence not only to law enforcement officers ... but also to employees who are present at every point in the system. No one is in a better position to recognize irregularities on the ground than the people who regularly work there.”

The Volpe Center likewise recently concluded that “probably the most significant factor in determining whether a transportation employee makes a helpful or harmful decision during an emergency is training. Trained and alert transportation professionals can make the difference between success and disaster. Characteristics such as acting responsibly to protect the lives of the public; keeping one’s cool and keeping passengers calm; contacting emergency assistance authorities quickly and reporting the essential details accurately; working cooperatively as a member (and sometimes a leader) of a team with a common goal - can all be enhanced through proper training.”

Officials from both FTA and TSA have also publicly recognized the need for this training, and yet little if anything has been done to ensure that the training is provided. While vague press releases and statements from these federal agencies and the transit industry claim that employees are being trained, this is simply not reality. I know this because I have talked to our members - the ones who are supposedly being trained - and they tell me a different story. They are scared - not because they know there is a threat, but because they feel out of the information loop. They have no idea how to help prevent an incident or what to do if one occurs.

In 2001, shortly after September 11th, the ATU conducted a survey of our members and found that 80% reported that their employer had not provided them with any security training. We conducted a follow-up survey this past fall, and while we are still compiling the results, the preliminary results indicate that approximately 60% of ATU members working for transit systems in the U.S. remain untrained in emergency preparedness and response. Surprisingly, this number includes employees of transit systems in major cities that are at high risk of terrorist attacks. For security reasons, I will not publicly disclose the names of those systems.

Some transit systems, including most recently WMATA here in D.C., have chosen to train all of their frontline employees, and others are making comprehensive efforts to likewise train their employees. We applaud these systems for their commitment to security. Unfortunately, they are not the majority in the industry.

In many cases, workers receive at most a piece of paper asking them to be “vigilant” and to

be aware of suspicious persons or packages. Other workers have watched a short 10 - 15 minute video. These materials do nothing to prepare a worker for a real security incident.

In testimony before this Subcommittee last summer, Chris Kozub, Associate Director of Safety and Security at the National Transit Institute (NTI), stated that “a large number of frontline transit employees in this country still lack proper training and preparedness for preventing and/or responding to incidents.” In fact, according to Kozub’s testimony, NTI’s training program - which is considered to be the leading security training program in the transit industry - has only been provided to approximately twenty percent of the transit industry’s total workforce. It is significant to point out that the NTI security training programs are available to transit agencies free-of-charge.

Unfortunately, the availability of a free training program and overwhelming evidence of the need for training has not been sufficient to convince many transit agencies to provide the necessary training. Transit systems continue to resist calls for training because of the operating cost to pay employees and to keep the buses and trains running during training sessions.

It is time for the federal government to step in and to not only provide funding for the operating costs associated with training, but to also require all transit systems to train each and every frontline transit employee. It is the role of the federal government to ensure that this happens. Leaving it exclusively to industry is, as experience dictates, not sufficient.

The leadership of this Subcommittee and the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee as a whole recognized the need for such action in the last Session when you reported out H.R. 5082 - a bill that would have authorized significant funding for both transit and over-the-road bus security and would have required transit systems to provide training to frontline employees as a condition of receiving such funding. The ATU supported this bill last Session and we encourage the committee to once again move similar legislation as soon as possible.

We need to take action now to address the security needs of the transit and over-the-road bus industries - and most importantly to train the workers in these industries. Doing so now will save lives.

I thank you again for the opportunity to testify today on behalf of the ATU. I can not stress enough how important it is to include the input of transportation labor in this discussion. It is our members who are on the front lines of this battle and who know best what dangers they face everyday on the job. I appreciate your recognition of this fact and look forward to working with you to address the important issues raised here today.

I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.